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AND
HOCHELAGA.

MAISONNEUVE
AND
VILLE-MARIE.

TWO HISTORIC POEMS OF MONTREAL.

BY

WALTER NORTON EVANS.

MONTREAL:
W. DRYSDALE & CO., 232 ST. JAMES STREET.
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Entered according to Act of Parliament, in the year one thousand eight hundred and ninety-five,
by Walter Norton Evans, in the office of the Minister of Agriculture.

CARTIER AND HOCHELAGA.

3RD OCTOBER, 1535.

INTRODUCTORY.

Long had the dying Spirit of the Past
Held men in chains; and all the listless world
Looked backward, to behold its golden age.
But now, new thoughts were borne into men's minds;
New visions woke new hopes; new hopes begat
The spirit of adventure; and men longed
To dare the stormy seas, the pathless woods,
The ravenous beast, the still more savage man,
To clasp the goddess Fortune to their breasts,
And, staking life itself upon the venture,
To seek for Fame in distant, unknown lands.

The Dons of Spain, the Cavaliers of France,
Had crossed the boisterous western seas, and met
In bloody conflict on the western shores.
And France had pushed her ventures to the north,
And found the mighty river of her dreams.

Buoyed by such hopes, the dauntless Cartier came,
And turned his prow to the mysterious West
For days and days; and passed so many leagues
Upon the sea-like waters, that he thought
This was indeed the highway to the East.
Where Fame and Fortune waited every seeker.

THE LANDING.

The earliest tints of dawning day
Had scarcely touched the welkin gray,
When warlike Cartier gave command
A section of his men should land,
The others, as a trusty guard,
About the boats keep watch and ward.
October's sun rose huge and red;
The haze, which Autumn's night had spread,
Now quickly roll'd away;
The blue-bird's, and the robin's song,
And squirrel's chatter, loud and long,
Welcomed the god of day.
The wild vine showed its purple fruit;
The golden-rod its brilliant suit;
Whilst all along the river's edge,
The wild-fowl thronged the leafy sedge.

Oh, where in France's gardens fair
Had shone such colours, rich and rare,
As glowed o'er all that forest wide,
And its dim arches glorified ?
The maple raised its glittering head ;
The sumach blazed in fiery red ;
Whilst, like a king, above them all,
Rose the dark pine, long-armed and tall.

THE MARCH.

Short time was left each man, I ween,
For contemplation of the scene.
The leader eyed his warlike band,
Impatient waiting his command
To solve the forest's mystery;
Then forward moved with courage high.
Their helmets' sheen, as on they pass,
Vied with the glint of bright cuirass;
The arquebuse's murderous throat
Restrained its harsh, death-dealing note;
The halberd ceased its work of blood,
And like a peaceful herald stood;
And trumpet tones, for battle bred,
Here on a peaceful mission sped.
An ill-marked pathway thro' the wood,
Tho' plain to those of Indian blood,

Might well have led the troop astray,
More used to march on clearer way.
But scarcely had their tramp begun,
Scarce had they left the morning sun,
When dusky warriors drew near,
Their steps to guide, their hearts to cheer.
Thro' forests deep they held their way,
Whose branches dimmed the light of day;
Whose tangled boughs, and bushes low,
Joined to repel th' advancing foe.
And monarchs of the forest shade,
By the fierce lightning lowly laid,
Across their pathway thickly strown,
Mourned all their pristine glories gone.
The moose across the open glade
Sprang wildly toward the forest shade;
The wild-cat howled, disturbed its prey;
The noisome snake moved swift away.
Thus thro' the tangled brush they passed,
And clearings fair were reached at last,

Where golden growths, from virgin soil,
Waited the reapers' willing toil.
Peace seemed to brood upon the air,
And Plenty smiled to soothe each care.

HOCHELAGA.

But see, where, in the clearing brown,
Stands Hochelaga's fortressed town ;
Her warriors brave, her sachems wise,
Maids with arch smile, and laughing eyes,
Lads lithe as saplings, squaws made old
By ceaseless labours' pangs untold.
Th' unguarded portal soon is passed ;
Within the Indian town at last
Stands Cartier with his martial show.
Will he be held as friend or foe ?
The red man long had learned to see
In each dark skin an enemy,
Save where the tribal tie was found,
Or wampum-witnessed treaties bound ;
But a white face he ne'er had seen,
Such costly robes, such noble mien ;—

These must be demi-gods at least,
Heaven-sent, to bless their harvest feast.
Each squaw brought forth her youthful care,
The expected benison to share,
And kissed the hand, with awe and fear,
That brought the wished-for blessing near.
The girls, in superstition bred,
Felt half their fears already fled,
Approached the white men, stroked their hair,
And wondered at their clothing rare.
Next, chiefs and warriors clustered round,
Of clamorous women cleared the ground,
Bidding them bring the sick and lame
To hear the strangers' "Holy Name,"
To touch their hands, to feel their breath,—
Charms to defeat approaching death.
Borne on a skin, the aged Chief,
Hoping that he might find relief
From palsied limb and age-dimmed eye,
On Cartier looked imploringly.

The soldier had no secret charm
To drive away each hidden harm,
No spell to re-enforce the weak,
Or flush with health the sick man's cheek ;
His only hope the Gospel word,
His trust, the Passion of his Lord.
These he rehearsed with reverent air,
Prayed help for every sufferer there ;
Asked needed blessings on them all,
And held by Faith, though Hope was small.
"A god!" the simple Indian cried.
A god ? Alas, how art can hide,
From untrained eyes, and trusting minds,
The truth that worldly wisdom finds.
Ere long the white man's cruel nod
Shewed more the devil than the god !

MOUNT ROYAL.

But longing for another sight,
Cartier next sought the mountain's height.
O, broad expanse! O, vision rare!
Where is another scene so fair?
Beneath his feet, broad fields of corn,
That half the mountain's side adorn;
Beyond, a narrow belt of wood;
And then the river's swelling flood
Of blue as deep as summer sky,
And foam-flecked where the rapids lie.
What other river broad and clear
As this, so proudly rolling here?
Where can be found its mighty source?
What marvels mark its onward course?
Who first shall see th' enchanted shore
With gold and gems besprinkled o'er,

The portal of the dreamy East,
Where Summer spreads her endless feast;
Where birds, in plumage rich and gay,
Awake the morn with joyful lay,
And, when the sun sinks in the west,
With sweetness sing the world to rest;
Where maids of loveliest form and face
The leafy paradises grace,
And fill the softly whispering grove
With songs of joy and sighs of love?
Beyond the river's farthest shore
Primeval forests rise once more.
And on the blue horizon's verge
Into the cloud-land gently merge.
The wood-crowned hills, like islands green,
Lend a rare beauty to the scene;
And far away, the mountains blue
With giant forms hem in the view.
The leader's soul was deeply stirred;
He spoke, and thus his followers heard:

" Is this the earth on which I stand ?
Or is it but the border-land
O'er which the soul, its sins forgiven,
Finds its blest way from earth to heaven ?
A miracle of beauty lies
Outstretched before my wondering eyes ;
Dim forms of ill blend threat'ningly
With visions bright of good to be.
Blest hill of promise, by thy name
Of 'Royal Mountain' rise to fame !"
Could he have read, with prophet's eye,
The pages of futurity,
And seen across the vision thrown
A nation alien to his own,
With nobler methods, gentler sway,
And aiming at a brighter day,
Her glory writ on History's page,
And Freedom as her heritage,
He would have sighed, for love of France,
Whilst glorying in the world's advance.

ADIEU.

Farewell to Hochelaga now!
The waters ripple at their prow;
The mountain passes from their sight;
And soon their boats are wrapped in night.

* * * * * * *

Around that Indian village press
The dark clouds of forgetfulness.
The pageant of her matrons, maids,
Warriors and Chiefs, from history fades.
Her palisaded strength all gone,
A wilderness where plenty shone.
No white man e'er again has seen
That Indian home 'mid forests green.
It vanished, as the twilight gray
When the sun spreads his glorious ray;
And where man once subdued the plain,
The forest soon was king again!

MAISONNEUVE AND VILLE-MARIE.

18TH MAY, 1642.

Come from the grave, ye solemn centuries;
Ye silent years, so long expired, and wrapt
In the cold cerements of the past, come forth!
Bring us the record of the days that were,
When this fair land, then in her pristine youth,
Had scarcely listened to the white man's voice,
Or felt his footstep on her throbbing bosom.
Give us again the solemn, waving pines,
The quivering sumach, and the silver birch,
The shadeful maples, spreading thro' the vales,
And the deep, vast, unutterable silence,
That brooded o'er them all. And thou, great City,
Whose pulses throb with strong and busy life,

Whose thousands daily call on thee for bread,
Whilst others waste enough to feed thy poor,
Sink once again into thy nothingness,
And let us stand and gaze upon the scene
Of promise and of pain when thou wert born.

The misty fountains of the Past appeared
Flowing with miracle. The old dreamed dreams,
The young saw visions. Holy women breathed
An atmosphere that was not of the earth,
And, lifted into the supernal spheres,
Conversed with saints and angels; even saw
The Virgin Mother and the Holy Child!
Earth's honours were as dross, and worldly wealth
But as the seed to sow with bounteous hand.

The dazzling glories of the setting sun
Shone o'er a land of beauty and of worth
Whose swarthy children had no thought of God,
Over whose fortunes Satan reigned supreme.

The Holy Christ would win them for His own,
And plant His Kingdom deep within their hearts ;
And Mary, jealous for her blessed Son,
Called all her own to join the sacred cause :—
The priest, to spread the glory of the Cross ;
The nun, to give her holiest, purest love,
To teach or nurse the living, bless the dead.
Fair women gave themselves, their hearts, their hands,
To aid the coming of the brighter day ;
Brave soldiers laid their swords upon the altar,
And vowed—come joy or woe, come life or death—
Still to march on beneath the sacred banner,
And win the field for Mary and her Son.
O, glorious vision of the pure in heart,—
God's Kingdom firmly planted upon earth !
Such was the vision in the mind of each ;
Such was the hope that sent them bravely forth
Across the boisterous seas, and planted them,
A seed of promise in a cruel land !

The month of Mary, with its cloudless skies,
Its balmy nights, and days of growing heat,
Had woo'd the soul of Nature, till her glance
Shewed more of love and life than was her wont
During the speechless months of Winter's reign.
The streams, now loosened from their iron bonds,
Danced in the sunlight, and, with headlong speed,
Rushed toward the rolling river, whose broad waters
Swept on in majesty between its banks,
Already green beneath the breath of Spring.
New life was in the forest, in whose depths
Were heard the merry love-songs of the birds
Seeking their mates, or pouring in their ears
Stories of Summer days that soon should be;
The lithesome squirrel gambolled on the bough;
The wood-chuck, waking from his winter's dream,
Sought 'neath the drift of last year's fallen leaves
For food to satisfy his hunger's pang.
New life appeared in forest and in stream;
On mountain height, in lowly smiling vale;

In every creature drawing vital breath ;
New life, new purpose, aspiration new
In man, the lord of forest, stream, and hill.

Upon St. Lawrence' thickly-wooded shore
A pilgrim band was waiting hopefully
For all this precious promise of the Spring ;
And, ere the growing promise was fulfilled,
They launched their little fleet upon the waves
Of the great king of waters, trusting Him
Who keeps the pole-star in its wonted place ;
Praying the Virgin Mother and her Son
To guide them safely to their unknown haven.
The breeze, so gentle, scarcely filled the sails
Spread to invite its stimulating force.
No ripple on the waters stirred the shadows
Of tree, and rock, and sky, reflected there.
Earth seem'd enwrapt in the deep peace of Heaven.
And yet, within the silent, pathless woods,
Behind each jutting rock upon the shore,

Hid in the peaceful shades of slumb'rous isles,
On every hand lay dangers unsuspect :
The unfaithful friend, the cruel, lurking foe.
Great God, protect them ! for they seek Thy will,
And none but Thee can guide their course aright !

Small were the numbers of that little band,
But varied were their motives and their aims.
The worldly power was there, selfish and vain,
Hating the pure, the noble, and the true ;
The Priest, prepared to raise God's holy altar,
A fount of blessing in a savage land ;
Self-sacrificing Valor had its place,
Giving itself without reserve or stint
To do God's work while yet it was the day ;
Virtue, unsullied by one worldly taint ;
Love without measure for the ideal good ;
Pure aspiration for the perfect life.
All these were in that little company,
Fast drawing toward the haven of their dreams.

And God was there, calm-brooding over all;
Giving new Hope to light the darksome way;
Waking new Faith, when Faith itself grew dim;
Answering His children's cry for sympathy
With the exhaustless tide of Love Divine.

On the pure air resounds their morning hymn,
To Heaven ascending: "Mater sanctissima,
Ora pro nobis." And the prayer is heard;
For never yet was prayer unheard on high
When in the heart's pure depths it found its source.

The boats are pushed once more into the stream;
Before them lies a jutting tongue of land,
On one side washed by the St. Lawrence tide,
The other by a little purling stream
That here completes its short and tortuous course.
Beyond, a narrow strip of meadow-land,
Green with the tender shooting grass of Spring,
And gay with early flowers of varied hue,

Where scattered trees shelter among their branches
Birds of the sweetest song and plumage rare ;
And then the vast, impenetrable forest,
Home of the deer, the wild-cat, and the bear,
Its serried ranks, silent and motionless,
Guarding the unknown land that lies beyond ;
And yet, with its mysterious, solemn mien,
Inviting to its conquest him who dares.

The boats now neared the soft, inviting shores,
And as the foremost touched the tongue of land,
Maisonneuve sprang upon the sandy beach
And fell upon his knees, the first to kiss
The promised land ; the first to breathe a prayer
From the long-dreamed of and mysterious realm ;
And each one, as he landed on the shore,
Copied the leader's act, and knelt, and prayed.
Then rose upon the silent morning air
Such hymns of thanksgiving, such shouts of joy,
As woke the echoes in the distant woods,

Moving the birds to more enchanting song,
Soaring beyond the narrow realms of earth,
Reaching the pearly gates of Heaven itself,
Joining the Angels' chorus round the throne.

Forth stood the Priest before the company
Of sisters and of brothers, consecrate
By many a vow to this exalted work.
Simple of soul was he, but silver-tongued,
And all-persuasive in his Master's cause.
"My children, ye behold the holy land
Of our long seeking; let us sanctify it
By word and deed. And first, God's holy altar
Must be upreared, that we may sacrifice
The blessed Host—our solemn, daily duty;
And then ourselves, and all that we possess,
All that we are, or hope for, offer freely
To this celestial service." Willing hands,
Upheld by loving hearts, soon raised the pile,
So holy in the sight of every one;

And when the Priest had cleansed and blessed each part,
The Mass was offered ; and the incense rose
Like a sweet-smelling savour unto Heaven.
This done, the Pastor, with prophetic spirit,
Opened his mouth, and spoke with reverent air.
" As One of old, by Galilee's calm waters,
Likened the Kingdom to the mustard-seed,
The smallest of all seeds, yet apt to grow
Till it becomes a tree of vast expanse,
A home for all the birds that fly in air ;
So ye, to-day, are like that tiny seed,
The seed-grain of the Kingdom. Faithful be
To all the vows that ye hereto have made,
Trusting the Holy Mother and her Son ;
And ye, though few to-day, shall yet become
A countless host to cover all the land ;
God's smile shall be upon you, and His love
Abide with you, and with your children's children ;
And the small seed ye plant to-day become
The veritable Kingdom of our God !"

Each being filled with strength from Heaven above,
The day was spent in labour, to provide
Security 'gainst any lurking foe,
Protection from the cooler winds of night,
Seclusion for the women, and the means
To live within this wild and fruitless land.
And when the shades of evening gathered fast,
Spreading their gloom around the holy altar,
The fire-flies were entrapped, and gently bound
About the sacred precincts, shedding light,
Like twinkling stars. upon the solemn scene.
The vesper song rose on the evening air;
The prayer was said in trust and holy fear;
The guards were set, 'gainst dangers hidden deep
Within the moaning forest; and sleep fell
Upon the wearied wanderers; and their dreams
Were dreams of earth made glad with songs of Heaven.

Such was thy birth-day, happy Ville-Marie!
Thy Baptism, the Spirit from on high;

Thy Sponsors, noble, valiant hearts and true,
And virgin purity, and consecration
To earthly duties as the Will of God.
Tremble, if e'er thy children shall prove false
To all the promise herein made for them!

The vision of the Past now fades away;
Its memory remains to try our lives
By the high standard that its light affords.
The little seed has spread its branches high
And broad across the land; its fruit is shown
In this fair city of our love to-day.
Answer, ye heirs of all the glorious past:
Has Greed grown less, and Virtue more and more?
Has Self been crucified for others' good?
Is the same child-like trust our trust to-day?
Is that pure aspiration still our own,
Which brought the richest gifts of Heaven down,
Inspiring humble souls with strength divine?
If yea:—immovable our nation's life!
If no:—we hasten to deserved decay!

"WITNESS" PRINTING HOUSE